DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 187 015 EA 012 691

AUTHOR Newton, Robert R.
TITLE Lay Leadership in Catholic Schools: Dimensions and Dilemmas.
PUB DATE Oct 79
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Chief Administrators of Catholic Education (Albuquerque, NM, October 1979).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Boards of Education; *Catholic Educators; *Catholic Schools; Elementary Secondary Education; *Lay People; *Lay Teachers; *Leadership Responsibility; Nuns; Policy Formation; *Priests

ABSTRACT

The declining number of priests and nuns as teachers in Catholic schools, combined with the increasing emphasis placed on the role of the laity is shifting responsibility for leadership in Catholic schools to lay persons. The impact of this shift is being experienced in three areas: a new vision of the "ministry of teaching" which places lay teachers on an equal footing with religious teachers; the involvement of the laity on policy-making boards of Catholic schools and school systems; and the increasing need to foster rather than assume the existence of a community spirit in Catholic schools. Each of these trends presents both a serious opportunity and a significant challenge. (Author/MLF)

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Robert R. Newton
University of San Francisco

LAY LEADERSHIP IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: DIMENSIONS AND DILEMMAS

A Paper Presented at the Annual Convention of the Chief Administrators of Catholic Education - October, 1979, Albuquerque, New Mexico

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The term lay leadership in Catholic schools has many possible meanings and raises an equal number of serious questions. For example, it can refer to a new vision of Catholic education which sees the work of education in the Church no longer as a mission entrusted to the religious orders and congregations but rather as a 'ministry of teaching' in which both lay and religious share as equal partners. Lay leadership can also refer to the new role of lay persons on policy-making boards which in varying degrees have assumed responsibility for insuring the survival and charting the future of Catholic education either on the local school or diocesan system levels. Finally, the term lay leadership can refer to the increasingly dominant role that lay persons are assuming in shaping the actual environment which permeates Catholic education, that atmosphere which both gives Catholic schools their unique 'climate" and, also, most would agree, more than the formal course of studies, produces the characteristic effect of the Catholic school.

Each of these dimensions of lay leadership presents both an exciting opportunity and a serious challenge. The following pages will explore these three dimensions of lay leadership and describe both the promise and the problems they pose for Catholic education in the near future. After discussing these three dimensions, two additional

EA 012 691

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problems will be raised which must be solved if lay leadership in Catholic schools is to fulfill its promise.

The Ministry of Teaching

The new vision of the role of lay persons in Catholic education might be best illustrated by an example. Increasingly within the past several years, the Jesuit Secondary Education Association, both because of Church statements and the enlarged number of lay faculty members, had become aware of the need to help Jesuit high schools in the United States redefine the role of lay faculty in these schools. After serious discussion over a year's time, it was decided to initiate a project whose aim would be the redefinition of the role of the lay person in Jesuit schools. The title of the project was to be the "Colloquium on Lay Colleagueship". No sooner had the first session of the planning group been convened than objection was raised to the name of the project. The term lay colleagueship implied that the lay persons were to be brought into a colleague relationship with the religious. What was objectionable in this formulation of the project was the lingering assumption that the work of education was still a mission given to the religious community and that the way lay persons participated was by becoming colleagues to the religious. Rather, it was argued, real adaptation to the new vision of the laity should not continue to cast the laity in the role of helpers to the religious but should interpret the Church's educational work as a 'ministry of teaching' in which both religious and laity participated on an equal footing, in which both brought something unique and essential to the work. This view was accepted and the Project on Lay Colleagueship became the Project on the Ministry of Teaching and is currently being implemented on a nationwide basis.

This is just one instance in the educational arena of a much larger movement within the Catholic Church which is emphasizing the role of the laity in a way that is significantly new. In the past, the Catholic Church, the most visibly and strongly institutional of the Christian denominations, has been primarily identified with and controlled by a religious/clerical segment of Catholicism in a way that Protestant denominations have not. The re-emphasis of the importance of lay involvement found in official church pronouncements has combined with the practical reality of a declining number of priests and religious. Vision and pragmatism are joined to project a new role of the laity in the work of the Church generally, in the work of education in particular.

My contact with Christian educators from other denominations, especially those from Lutheran schools, has convinced me that we have a great deal to learn from them in working out a Catholic vision of the ministry of teaching. Their schools, operated by lay rather than clerical/religious personnel, are viewed as extensions of the ministry of their Church. The lay persons involved in school work see their roles in vocational, ministerial terms. If Catholic schools are to adapt to the changed environment in the Church, this same sense of lay vocation to teaching must become one of the key concepts and realities of Catholic education.

It will not be an easy transition. The challenge to both laity and religious involves a significant change in roles and behavior. Religious and clerics, accustomed to seeing themselves as more enlightened about goals, better prepared to articulate the vision of Catholic education,

more responsible for the outcomes of Catholic schools, must see themselves as partners rather than the primary recipients of the vocation of teaching. Religious communities and diocesan offices will have an especially hard time adjusting to this new role. The communication networks within the clerical/religious world are firmly established, based on common understandings and long experience of working together. To begin to treat lay persons as leaders in Catholic education on more than a token basis will require significant adaptation on the part of clerics and religious.

The transition for lay people will be even more dramatic. The opportunity to be equal partners in the educational ministry of the Church is paralleled by a similar demand for a qualitatively different level of commitment and service. Proposed is a re-emphasis of teaching as a vocation, a calling to which the laity respond not only because of concern for education but out of religious motives, because of a desire to spend their lives in spreading the Gospel through the ministry of teaching. Many lay teachers in the past have had a sense of commitment, both in schools and colleges. As mentioned above, however, most saw themselves as cooperating with the religious whose job it was to run the educational institutions of the Church. Today the call is quite different. They are being called directly rather than through a religious group, called to assume a deeper level of responsibility, called to exercise a more vigorous role in the leadership of Catholic education.

The ministry of teaching proposes a new vision of Catholic education. It holds tremendous potential and richness because it can release new energies and commitment on the part of the Catholic laity. At the same time, it will require a significant shift in roles both for religious and clerics who, to this point, have both guided and controlled a Catholic education, and for the laity, who, until this time, have not seen themselves as directly responsible for the Church's mission in education.

The Laity and Policy-Making

One of the most extensive ways in which lay leadership has emerged in the past decade has been in the school board movement in Catholic education. In the last ten years I have participated in the revitalization of at least ten boards of trustees on both the school and college level. In each case, the purpose has been the same: to involve a broader spectrum of the Catholic community in decisions made about Catholic education. This movement did not proceed solely from a vision of the laity that emerged after Vatican II; rather it also received impetus from a realization that the serious problems in which practically every school found itself could be better addressed by calling on expertise outside of the tight circle of the religious order or parish or diocese which, to that point, had operated the college or school. The increasing complexity of problems in school management, in budgeting, in fund raising, in public relations, in development of the educational program, in longrange planning, et cetera, turned the attention of school administrators to the outside community and to experts in the community who possessed these skills to a much higher

degree than those who had been trained in the typical seminary or religious formation program. Catholic schools had to become more complicated and sophisticated enterprises if they were to both survive and flourish. This meant searching outside traditional circles for help and involving persons committed and interested in Catholic education who could contribute time, energy and expertise.

My own experience has been that the movement to place lay members on boards of directors has had dramatically positive effects. Looking at the school from the perspective of systems theory, inclusion of the laity on boards has meant a substantial infusion of new resources and inputs into the operation of the school or college. Persons who were interested in Catholic education, who had developed competence in different fields not only responded to the invitation to contribute but did so with an enthusiasm that far exceeded original expectations. Lay board members, perhaps even more than the religious, were accustomed to assuming both authority and responsibility for a corporate venture; it was often the lay members'dedication and willingness to contribute time and expertise which challenged the religious to responsible board membership rather than vice versa.

At the same time, while the inclusion of the laity on boards has resulted in significant gains, it has also presented serious questions for the future of Catholic education. We are all aware that most of the private colleges and schools in the United States had sectarian religious origins. Harvard College, as so many others, was founded to prepare young men for the ministry. To this point in time, the religious character of Catholic schools has been preserved by the ownership and

control of religious congregations or parish and diocesan officials. Though the shortrange benefits of sharing authority, responsibility and leadership with lay persons may be obvious and essential, how can we be sure that the longrange effect will not be similar to the denominational colleges which gradually slipped away from their religious purposes to become secular private colleges or schools? And, as we point to the danger to Catholic schools, could not a cogent argument be made that, for many Catholic colleges, it is no longer a danger but an accomplished fact.

Obviously, one answer is the development of a strong sense of participation in the Church's ministry of education among members of boards; in this way, the fundamentally religious nature of their stewardship can be emphasized and strengthened. There are certainly other ways in which this longrange problem can be confronted or avoided. The intent here is simply to point out that the danger exists and requires attention and concern.

Another significant problem which emerges in policy-making for Catholic schools is what appears to me to be a basic structural weakness in the parish board movement. I have studied the guidelines that have emerged from several diocesan school offices that have made significant efforts to establish parish school boards. After lengthy experience with boards of schools and colleges which are corporations in their own right, I am sensitive to the rights, responsibility and authority of a board of directors of a nonprofit corporation. The typical board is responsible to the state for the proper use of the assets of the corporation in accord with the board or matters of

policy and the use of the corporation's assets in fulfilling its corporate purposes. Authority and responsibility are parallel and clearly reside in the board. In the parish board movement, the roles of the principal, the board, the pastor, the diocesan office and bishop are often overlapping or unclear. Frequently, the structure which has been evolved appears to place direction of the school in the hands of the board; at the same time the legal responsibility rests outside of the board and more clearly with the pastor and bishop. Though, as students of administration agree, any organizational arrangement can be effective as long as the persons involved agree and can work together, in the long run a structure which separates ultimate authority and responsibility from the board will lead to conflict when controversy emerges over an important issue. I do not propose a solution, but merely point to what I consider a serious issue in the background of an aspect of lay leadership which the parish board movement represents.

Lay Leadership and the Building of Community

Probably the most extensive study of the differences between Catholic and public schools is currently being conducted by the Center for Research in Private Education at the University of San Francisco. It compares the perceptions of parents, students and teachers in the schools of British Columbia prior to the implementation of a voucher system. The primary finding of the study is that the private schools (most of which are Catholic) are marked by a very strong sense of community, of mutual commitment among parents, students and teachers. The British Columbia research offers the tentative conclusion that this unique learning environment is probably at the heart of the success

of the Catholic schools.

Two of the chief factors which produce this community atmosphere are homogeneity and transference. Homogeneity refers to the general consensus and commitment that exists among the parents, faculty and students on what the school should accomplish. It derives from adherence to a collective system of beliefs and practices. Transference refers to the tendency of families to see the school as an extension of the church, and, for example, to transfer to the principal of the Catholic school feelings similar to those one has about the pastor of the church. The implications of these two findings strike me as important for our understanding of the emerging role of the lay leadership in Catholic education.

Formerly, Catholic schools existed in a relatively 'closed system'. There was general agreement on the beliefs and activities which characterized a practicing Catholic. The Church was a stable organization which existed in a stable environment. The religious orders which ran schools also exhibited the similar stability and transmitted this clear perception of Catholicism in school programs and activities. Teachers in Catholic schools received their training either in religious communities or in Catholic colleges. Thus there was a high level of consensus and homogeneity within the Catholic environment, the Church itself and Catholic education.

Today this homogeneity is being threatened by the changes that have taken place in the Catholic environment, in the Church and in the schools. Obviously these changes affect the personnel who create

the religious climate of the Catholic school. In times past, we could presume that the Catholic school was a community because both students and teachers emerged from a traditional Catholic environment. Today, for both students and faculty, diversity rather than homogeneity is characteristic of the backgrounds, beliefs and practices of teachers and families. Even within the religious orders, the rock of stability previously, the same tensions and diversity exist. As a result, rather than assume that community exists, Catholic schools must attempt to build community. It seems to me that the recent interest in the concept of faith community and the rush on many schools and dioceses into teacher formation programs are a response to the need to build rather than assume community.

The emergence of lay leadership at this time of transition in the Church poses special opportunity and challenge. If the key to the Catholic school is the formation of community based on religious assumptions, and if the increasingly lay staffs of Catholic schools are coming from more diverse backgrounds, it is quite possible that the community aspect of the Catholic school will be severely weakened rather than maintained. Certainly, the effect of a loss of a sense of Catholic community in the colleges has been to narrow the difference between Catholic colleges and their secular counterparts. A significant part of this transition was the change in methods of hiring, developing and evaluating the faculty who create the religious environment of the college.

What I am suggesting is that the emergence of lay leadership in Catholic education at this time in the Church creates a special problem

which curiously lay leadership itself will be called upon to solve. The diversity of background which lay teachers and administrators will bring to Catholic schools will add a richness to the atmosphere of the Catholic school that it has not experienced before. At the same time, unless this diversity is unified and harnessed in some form of consensus or community, one of the key elements of Catholic education fall victim to this development.

Another equally serious problem in maintaining homogeneity in Catholic schools is the apparent contradiction that has emerged between the lay teacher association movement and the community of faith concept. The union movement is based on the assumption that an adversary relationship exists between labor and management in which both sides, by protecting the rights of their respective constituencies, work toward a mutually agreeable solution. The concept of faith community, on the other hand, assumes a cooperative relationship in which both labor and management are committed to a religious value system and to working together to the accomplishment of common purposes. Thus, at a moment when lay involvement in the building of community is becoming even more essential, the union movement among lay teachers threatens to create an adversarial rather than a communitarian relationship. Can Catholic schools, apparently no longer under the strictures of the National Labor Relations Board, work out a new kind of relationship between teachers and administration which both protects the rights of faculty members and at the same time promotes the concept of faith community and shared responsibility?

If such a model cannot be generated, the concept of faith community will suffer, and, with it, the impact of the Catholic schools on their graduates.

Touching briefly on the concept of transference, an additional problem may emerge. Catholic parents transfer to the principal and faculty of the Catholic school the feelings that they have about their religion. This is especially true when the principal or teacher is a religious who, by very vocation, has identified his/her life with service in the Church. The question can be raised whether transference will become less intense if the faculty becomes predominately lay rather than religious. Just as the teachers will be challenged to see their role as the ministry of teaching, a vocation, so Catholic parents will be challenged to see the 'new' lay teachers as persons committed to a vocation in ways similar to the sisters, brothers and priests in previous eras. This will be a difficult but essential transition.

Two Additional Issues: Revitalization of Catholic Schools Through Turnover and Professional Preparation for Lay Leaders

There are two additional issues which should be raised in the discussion of lay leadership in Catholic schools which either are or could become serious practical problems.

The first concerns revitalization of schools through a regular turnover of leadership. Many would perhaps note that more often than not the problem in the past has been one of too much rather than too little turnover. At the same time, one of the strengths of the Catholic

school system has been the ability and general policy of religious congregations and dioceses to transfer personnel from one school to another either as the need arises or after a certain period of time. In parallel fashion, these same authorities have had the power to transfer administrators in and out of the classroom with relative ease. This has been one of the major forces preventing the stagnation which has overtaken many public school systems where administrators have often become an entrenched vested interest intent on resisting change and maintaining themselves. Research demonstrates that administrators (and teachers) become more set in their ways and less open to new ideas as their length of service increases. Where a religious principal could with relative ease be transferred to another school after a certain number of years, this does not seem possible with lay principals whose other obligations (e.g., family responsibilities) may prevent such easy transition. Where a religious principal could be reassigned to the classroom either in the same or another school, is this possible or appropriate with a lay principal, especially given the probable financial implications of such a move?

The second problem has the same basic origin as the first. Obviously Catholic educators are becoming more interested in programs which will develop the competencies that are increasingly required for principals or other leadership roles in Catholic education. The success of the Institute for Catholic Educational Leadership program at the University of San Francisco is a good example of the need and the new outlook on formal preparation of Catholic school principals. Where religious orders and congregations have a freedom and flexibility to participate in such programs both because they are able to call upon

the resources of their communities and because they are able, with ease, to move from one part of the country to the other without regard for immediate family obligations, lay persons do not enjoy either this financial support or flexibility. And, more often than not, their salaries are not sufficient to support the ever rising costs of graduate tuitions. Yet if lay principals are to become an increasing force in Catholic education, some way must be found to eliminate these disadvantages and allow and encourage lay aspirants to leadership posts in Catholic education to seek formal training for their roles.

In Conclusion

I have suggested three ways to understand the concept of lay leadership. The first focuses on a new vision of the ministry of teaching in the Catholic Church; the second emphasizes the sharing of authority and responsibility for the direction of Catholic schools with lay experts; the final perspective focuses on lay leadership as both the problem and the solution in maintaining the Catholic school as a focused community of faith.

In each of these perspectives, serious questions and challenges have been raised. Will the religious/clerical segment of the Church as well as the laity itself be willing to accept the new roles which are inherent in the concept of the ministry of teaching? How can this be facilitated? How can the Catholicity of the Catholic school be systematically preserved against the pressures toward secularization which have overcome other schools which transferred their governance from religious to lay hands? What is the solution to the apparent

structural problems of parish boards which will insure coordination and minimal conflict among those who have responsibility for Catholic schools? Can the problems of diversity and transition, exacerbated by the increasing numbers of lay teachers and administrators, be resolved by the laity themselves? What mechanisms or resources will be necessary to maintain the essential community aspect of the Catholic school?

And the two final issues: how will the revitalization of Catholic education accomplished in the past through the regular transfer of religious by their congregations be maintained with an increasing number of lay principals? What provisions will be made to allow potential lay leaders to acquire the professional background and competencies they need?

The emergence of lay leadership in Catholic schools holds significant promise and poses serious challenges to Catholic educators.